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IN A SOCIETY WHERE MUTANTS AND FORMER MUTANTS ALIKE FEEL THREATENED BY THE WORLD AROUND THEM, THEY TURN TO THEIR FIRST, BEST LINE OF DEFENSE WHENEVER TROUBLE ARISES: X-FACTOR, THE PRIVATE DETECTIVE AGENCY FOUNDED BY MADROX, THE MULTIPLE MAN.

X-FACTOR

PREVIOUSLY...

X-FACTOR MEMBERS MADROX, MONET, STRONG GUY, AND LONGSHOT HAVE TRACKED THEIR KIDNAPPED TEAMMATE DARWIN TO A WAREHOUSE OWNED BY THE KARMA PROJECT. MR. MANU–THE PROJECT'S HEAD–ORDERED THE WAREHOUSE TO BE BLOWN UP. WHICH IT WAS, BUT X-FACTOR BEING X-FACTOR, THE EXPLOSION DIDN'T STOP THEM. IT DOES EXPLAIN WHY MONET IS WEARING ONE OF MADROX'S SHIRTS, THOUGH. AS X-FACTOR FIND MANU, THEY'RE UNEXPECTEDLY CONFRONTED BY AN ARMY OF DARWINS–ALL POSSESSING HIS ABILITY TO INSTANTLY EVOLVE TO SURVIVE ANY SITUATION.

MEANWHILE, BACK AT X-F HEADQUARTERS, THE PREGNANT SIRYN WENT INTO LABOR. GOVERNMENT OFFICIAL VALERIE COOPER WAS THERE, TOO, REVEALING TO SIRYN AND RICTOR SOME OF MADROX'S SECRETS. BUT SIRYN'S WATER BREAKING REALLY TOOK PRIORITY.

MEANWHILE, PETER DAVID–WHO USUALLY WRITES THESE THINGS–IS BUSY RIGHT NOW, SO EDITOR JOHN BARBER WISHES TO THANK PENCILER LARRY STROMAN AND INKER JON SIBAL–WHO GOT UNEXPECTEDLY PULLED OFF TO OTHER PROJECTS–FOR ALL THEIR WORK ON THIS SERIES, AND TO THANK GUEST ARTIST NELSON FOR HIS EXEMPLARY WORK ON THIS ISSUE. BUT, ANYWAY, READ ON...

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OH MY GOD.
WHA...WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO, TERRY?
THE BABY ISN'T DUE FOR THREE WEEKS YET.
HERE, SIT DOWN...
SHE SHOULDN'T BE SITTING DOWN. NOT WITH HER WATER HAVING BROKEN AND THE BABY COMING.
DAMMIT! SHE'S RIGHT! HELP ME UP!
UNNFFF! O-OKAY. NOW WHAT?
CALL THE MIDWIFE.
YES, I SAW THAT IN THE FILE AND COULDN'T BELIEVE IT. "MIDWIFE"? WHAT IS THIS, MEDIEVAL EUROPE?
MIDWIVES ARE PERFECTLY VIABLE ALTERNATIVES TO OBSTETRICIANS, AND IT'S NONE OF YOUR DAMNED BUSINESS!
GOD, WHERE'S JAMIE WHEN I NEED HIM?

SOMEONE WANNA TELL ME WHAT I'M LOOKIN' AT HERE?
A HIGHLY EVOLVED OPPONENT, MR. CAROSELLA. OR OPPONENTS, AS IT WERE.
VOLUNTEERS WHO HAVE GIVEN THEIR BODIES OVER TO A GRAND EXPERIMENT IN REPLICATION.
"VOLUNTEERS," THEN THESE AREN'T--
DARWIN HIMSELF?
TRAGICALLY, NO. LIKE BEATLEMANIA, THEY ARE MERELY AN INCREDIBLE SIMULATION.
BUT WHAT THEY LACK IN AUTHENTICITY, THEY MORE THAN MAKE UP FOR IN ENTHUSIASM. WATCH:
GENTLEMEN...
KILL THEM.

SMART BUSINESS
I'M SO SICK OF THIS.
SICK OF BEING A PAWN IN SOMEONE ELSE'S GAME.
SICK OF NEVER FEELING AS IF I'M IN CONTROL OF MY OWN DESTINY.
I MEAN, HERE WE FOUND OUR WAY INTO THIS SECRET HEADQUARTERS OF THIS KARMA OUTFIT... EXCEPT THEY WERE WAITING FOR US.
AND WE MOWED THROUGH THEIR INITIAL SHOCK FORCES. THAT SHOULD MAKE US FEEL AS IF WE'RE TAKING CONTROL OF THE SITUATION, RIGHT?

EXCEPT NOW I DON'T KNOW IF OUR INITIAL TRIUMPH WAS SIMPLY TO SOFTEN US UP. MAKE US *THINK* WE HAD THE UPPER HAND--
--WHEN THIS GUY, WHOEVER HE IS, WAS TWO STEPS AHEAD OF US.
WHICH MEANS WE'RE STILL JUMPING THROUGH HIS HOOPS.

THERE'S NO POINT IN WASTING TIME SLUGGING IT OUT WITH HIS CANNON FODDER.
WHAT I NEED TO DO IS GET TO THE GUY WHO'S RUNNING THIS NUTHOUSE. SO THE SIMPLEST THING TO DO--
--IS LET A DUPE OF ME BE CREATED BY THE IMPACT FROM DARWIN...
AND HAVE MY CANNON FODDER DEAL WITH HIS CANNON FODDER.
!
YOU WANNA PIECE OF ME? HAH? DO YA?

OKAY, THIS IS JUST GETTIN' ANNOYIN'. IF THIS IS THE BEST YA CAN--
--HUH?
CLICK
-GLUB?-
-MUBBRFLBBR-

THE PROBLEM IS THAT WHENEVER YOU GET SUCKED INTO ONE OF THESE FIGHTS, YOU'RE LETTING THE BAD GUYS SET THE AGENDA.
FIGHTS ARE REACTIVE RATHER THAN ACTIVE.
INVARIABLY--
ARRRHHH!!
--YOU GET NAILED BY THE LEARNING CURVE.

MONET! KEEP BACK BEFORE--
CRACKK
BE QUIET AND HIT THE DECK.
YES, MA'AM.

THERESA, LISTEN TO ME...
RICTOR, GET THE DOOR.
THERESA--
MS. COOPER, I'M NOT REMOTELY INTERESTED IN DISCUSSING--
--THIS.
OH. WELL...
CRAP.

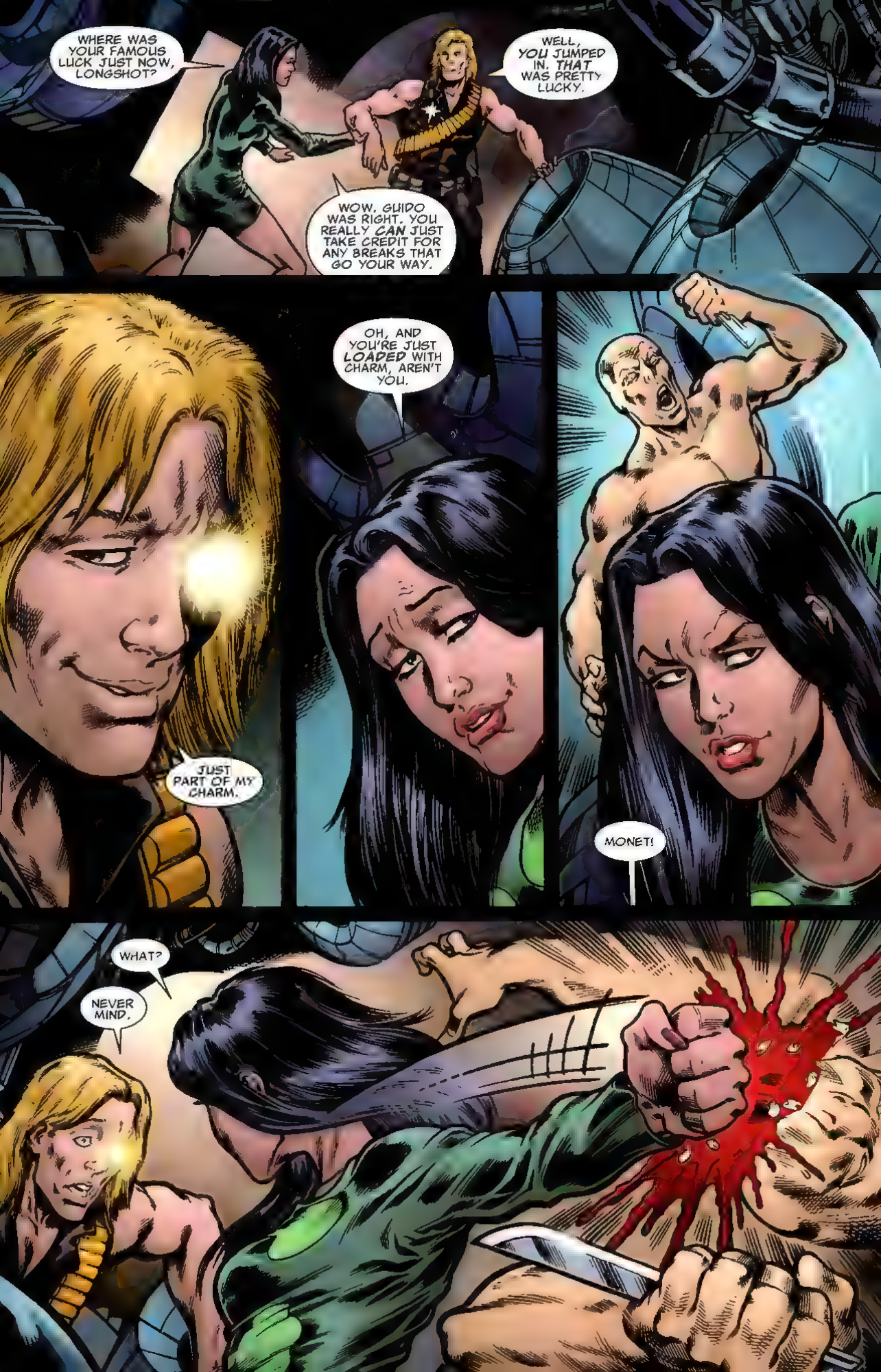
CAN YOU FLY?
CAN YOU? FLY?
WHAT?
I'M NOT BEING AT MY AERODYNAMIC BEST, BUT YES, BUT I'M IN NO SHAPE TO CARRY YOU AS WELL...
GO. I'LL DRAW THEIR ATTENTION, YOU TAKE OFF.
ARE YOU NUTS?
JUST DOING WHAT I GOTTA. THEY'RE NOT GETTING YOU OR THE BABY.
BUT--
--RICTOR, WAIT--
MADROX SHOULDA MARRIED YOU.
IF I WERE THE DAD, I WOULD'VE.
NOW GO!

GUN!!
AIM CLEAR OF THE WOMAN!
MAIL
WAIT! THIS ISN'T NECE--!
BLAM BLAM
BLAM BLAM
BLAM BLAM BLAM
TAKE HIM!!!

EEEEEEEEEE
PING
PING
PING
PING
PING
HE'S OUT OF BULLETS! NOBODY SHOOT!
I CAN RELOAD--
SHUT UP!
YOU THINK I WANT TO CELEBRATE MY CHILD'S BIRTHDAY EVERY YEAR BY REMEMBERING YOUR DEATH?
I WAS JUST TRYING TO--
I KNOW! I KNOW WHAT YOU WERE TRYING TO DO, AND IT WAS AS SWEET AS A PURELY SUICIDAL TACTIC CAN BE!
BUT BE PRACTICAL! YOU HEARD VAL! THEY KNOW WHO'S DELIVERING THE BABY! YOU THINK THEY WON'T HAVE PEOPLE AT THE HOSPITAL?
THINK, FOR GOD'S SAKE! THINK ABOUT--
cessary..

...I was going to say... it wasn't necessary...
Wouldn't want someone to get...hurt...by ricochets...

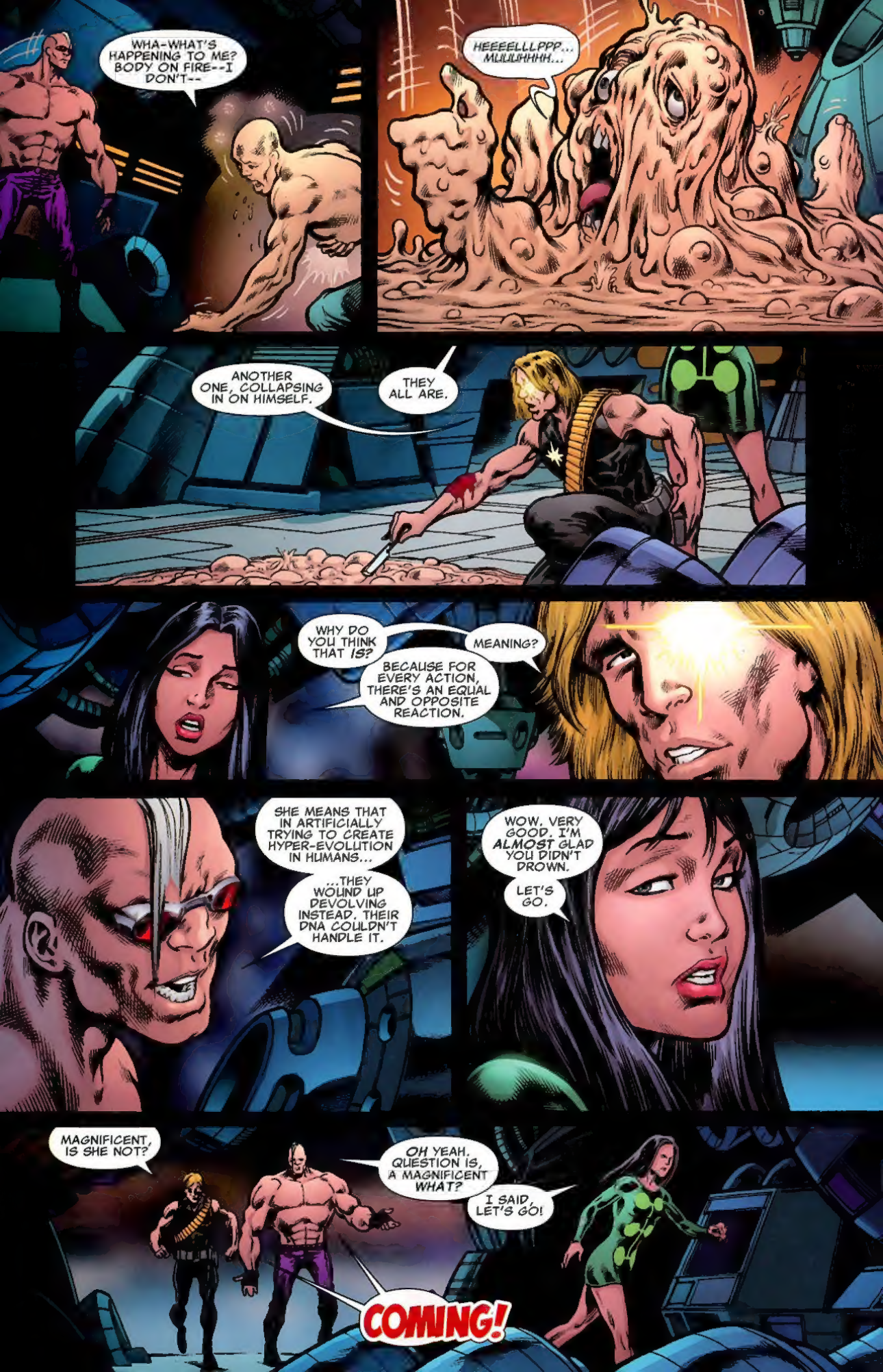
Weird. Sunset isn't for...a few hours yet...I thought...watch must be running slow...
Gotta... fix that...
I'LL GET HER TO THE HOSPITAL!
BUT YOU SAID--
SHE'S A LOT LIGHTER THAN YOU! I'LL MANAGE!
DON'T KILL EACH OTHER WHEN I LEAVE!
EEEEEEEE!
SO.
WASSUP?
GREEEEAT.

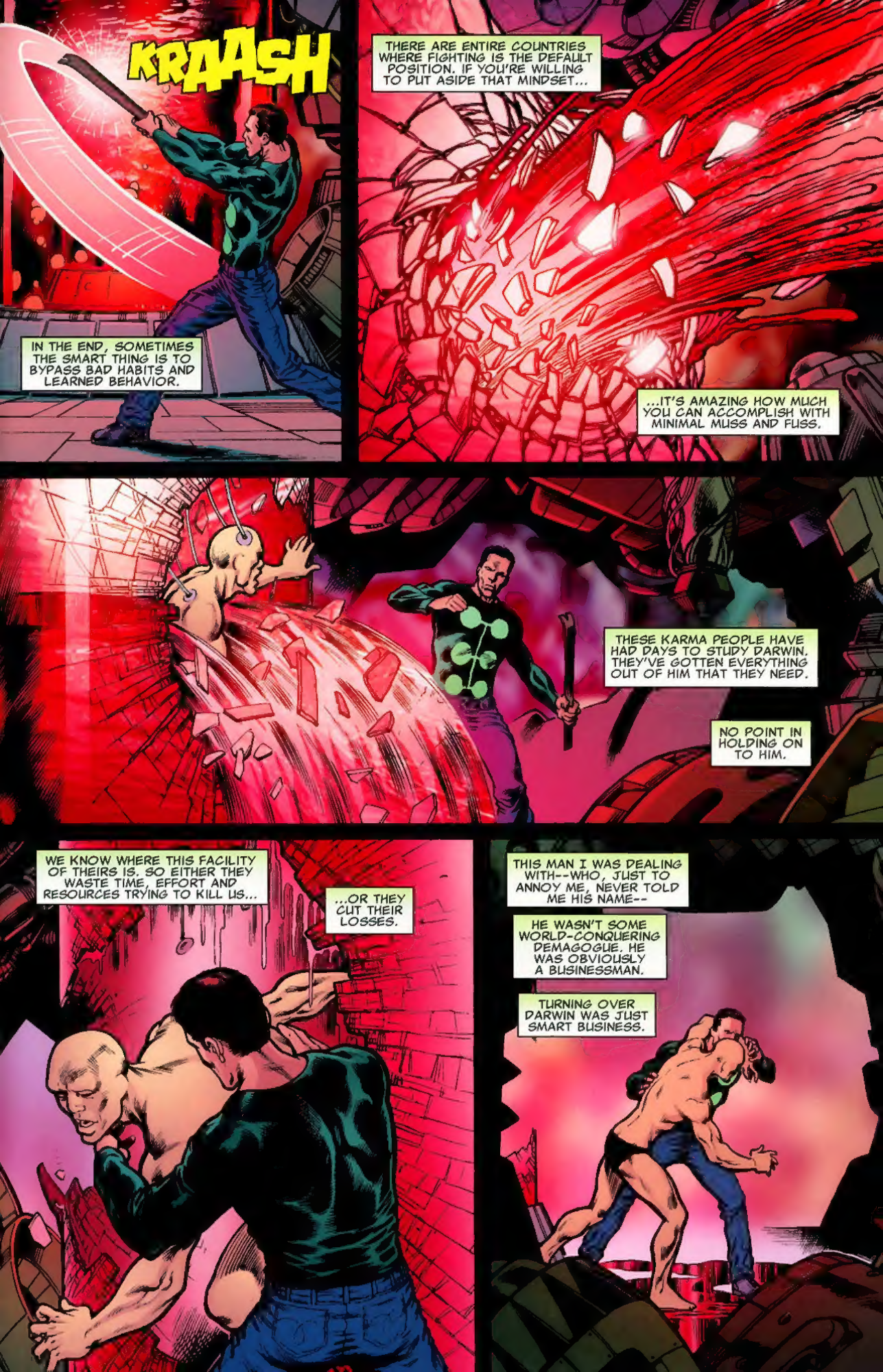

WHERE WAS YOUR FAMOUS LUCK JUST NOW, LONGSHOT?
WELL, YOU JUMPED IN. THAT WAS PRETTY LUCKY.
WOW, GUIDO WAS RIGHT. YOU REALLY CAN JUST TAKE CREDIT FOR ANY BREAKS THAT GO YOUR WAY.
OH, AND YOU'RE JUST LOADED WITH CHARM, AREN'T YOU.
JUST PART OF MY CHARM.
MONET!
WHAT?
NEVER MIND.

WHEN YOU SEE CERTAIN THINGS HAPPENING OVER AND OVER REPEATEDLY--
--YOU DON'T EVEN HAVE TO GIVE IT YOUR FULL ATTENTION.
MY MIND DISCONNECTS FROM THE FIGHT. THERE IS NO PURPOSE FOR IT
I'VE MOVED ON TO MORE IMPORTANT THINGS IN MY HEAD.
WHERE ARE YOU?!
COME ON! YOU HAVEN'T EVEN INTRODUCED YOURSELF!
GUYS LIKE YOU ARE USUALLY IN LOVE WITH THE SOUND OF YOUR OWN NAME!
YOU JUST CAN'T HELP STANDING THERE, LOOKING SMUG AND TOSSING IT AROUND!
YOU THINK YOU REALLY HAVE A HANDLE ON HOW THIS WILL ALL TURN OUT, DON'T YOU.
LET'S JUST SAY I'VE SEEN A LOT.
MORE THAN ANY MAN SHOULD?
I DARESAY. MORE THAN MOST.
IF YOU COUNT ALL THE LIFETIMES OF YOUR DUPLICATES CONSECUTIVELY RATHER THAN CONCURRENTLY, HOW LONG HAVE YOU LIVED? A *CENTURY? TWO?*
HOW MUCH *LIFE* EXPERIENCE DO YOU *HAVE?*

HAVE YOU NOTICED THE DARWINS AREN'T BOUNCING BACK AS FAST AS THEY WERE? THAT THEY AREN'T ADAPTING AS QUICKLY?
I WAS TOO BUSY BLEEDING TO PICK UP ON THAT, BUT NOW THAT YOU MENTION IT--
KRAAASH!!
GASP!
IT'S ALL RIGHT! ALMOST RAN OUTTA BREATH AND DROWNED, BUT IT'S OKAY! YOU CAN STOP WORRYING ABOUT ME!
WOULDN'T I HAVE HAD TO START WORRYING IN ORDER TO STOP?
NICE T'KNOW YA HAD MY BACK.
WHATEVER. LET'S FIND MADROX.

YOU WERE CONDUCTING SOME SORT OF EXPERIMENTS ON DARWIN.
TO TAP INTO HIS EVOLUTIONARY POWERS AND USE THEM TO CREATE...WHAT? SOLDIERS OF SOME KIND? MERCS, PERHAPS?
OBVIOUSLY.
SOMETHING LIKE THAT. AND YOU INTEND TO STOP ME--?
I ACTUALLY DON'T *GIVE* A DAMN WHAT YOUR LONG-TERM PLANS ARE.
IS THAT A FACT?
WE'RE NOT THE AVENGERS OR THE INITIATIVE OR SOME OTHER GROUP INTERESTED IN BRINGING DOWN VAST VILLAINOUS CONSPIRACIES.
WE'RE A DETECTIVE AGENCY. WE FULFILL A CLIENT'S NEEDS AND WE MOVE ON.
IN THIS CASE, YOUR ERSTWHILE CLIENT IS LYING COMATOSE, THANKS TO US. DOESN'T THAT *BOTHER* YOU?
SMALL LOSS.
WHY, MR. MADROX! I MAY HAVE *UNDERESTIMATED* YOU.
PERHAPS WE *CAN* COME TO AN AGREEMENT AFTER ALL.


WHA-WHAT'S HAPPENING TO ME? BODY ON FIRE--I DON'T--
HEEEELLLPPP... MUUUHHHH...
ANOTHER ONE, COLLAPSING IN ON HIMSELF.
THEY ALL ARE.
WHY DO YOU THINK THAT *IS*?
MEANING?
BECAUSE FOR EVERY ACTION, THERE'S AN EQUAL AND OPPOSITE REACTION.
SHE MEANS THAT IN ARTIFICIALLY TRYING TO CREATE HYPER-EVOLUTION IN HUMANS...
...THEY WOUND UP DEVOLVING INSTEAD. THEIR DNA COULDN'T HANDLE IT.
WOW. VERY GOOD. I'M *ALMOST* GLAD YOU DIDN'T DROWN.
LET'S GO.
MAGNIFICENT, IS SHE NOT?
OH YEAH. QUESTION IS, A MAGNIFICENT *WHAT*?
I SAID, LET'S GO!
COMING!


KRAASH
IN THE END, SOMETIMES THE SMART THING IS TO BYPASS BAD HABITS AND LEARNED BEHAVIOR.
THERE ARE ENTIRE COUNTRIES WHERE FIGHTING IS THE DEFAULT POSITION. IF YOU'RE WILLING TO PUT ASIDE THAT MINDSET...
...IT'S AMAZING HOW MUCH YOU CAN ACCOMPLISH WITH MINIMAL MUSS AND FUSS.
THESE KARMA PEOPLE HAVE HAD DAYS TO STUDY DARWIN. THEY'VE GOTTEN EVERYTHING OUT OF HIM THAT THEY NEED.
NO POINT IN HOLDING ON TO HIM.
WE KNOW WHERE THIS FACILITY OF THEIRS IS. SO EITHER THEY WASTE TIME, EFFORT AND RESOURCES TRYING TO KILL US...
...OR THEY CUT THEIR LOSSES.
THIS MAN I WAS DEALING WITH--WHO, JUST TO ANNOY ME, NEVER TOLD ME HIS NAME--
HE WASN'T SOME WORLD-CONQUERING DEMAGOGUE. HE WAS OBVIOUSLY A BUSINESSMAN.
TURNING OVER DARWIN WAS JUST SMART BUSINESS.

IS THAT THE ORIGINAL?
YEAH. ALTHOUGH YOU CAN MINDPROBE HIM IF YOU WANT TO MAKE SURE--
YES...BY ALL MEANS...IF IT WILL GIVE YOU A MEASURE OF SECURITY...
JUST...PUT YOUR MIND INTO MINE, MS. ST. CROIX. IT WON'T BOTHER ME. REALLY. STAY THERE AS LONG AS YOU WANT, UNTIL YOU'RE SURE THAT--
YEAH, THAT'S HIM.
DEFINITELY.
NO, REALLY, IT'S OKAY IF YOU NEED TO--
IT'S ALL RIGHT, I'M GOOD.
HOW'D YA FIND HIM?
THE BUSINESSMAN AND I HAD A CHAT AND CAME TO AN UNDERSTANDING TO STAY THE HELL OUT OF EACH OTHER'S WAY.
I CHASED DOWN THE HEAD GUY AND BEAT IT OUT OF HIM.
HE PULL A LAST MINUTE ESCAPE, SWEARIN' VENGEANCE?
EXACTLY.
MAN, I HATE WHEN THAT HAPPENS.
ME TOO.
YOU KNOW, I'M NOT A HUNDRED PERCENT SURE I'M ME. MAYBE MS. ST. CROIX SHOULD PROBE ME JUST IN CASE...
SORRY.
YEAH, OKAY, NOW YOU'RE JUST EMBARRASSIN' YERSELF, YA BLORK.
NEXT: THE BIRTH!

Scans by Zone